

Identifying Satisfiers and Dissatisfiers in the Service Encounter

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Abstract

Service attributes are important for customer perceptions of service quality. However, in spite of huge amount of research, the role of service attributes as satisfiers and dissatisfiers in service encounters is not understood well enough. An empirical investigation is conducted concerning a problem resolution service in the telecommunication industry. We use both qualitative and quantitative service performance data to describe and analyze how critical incidents can be used to identify and understand which service attributes are perceived as satisfiers and dissatisfiers. Our study reveals that there is a subset of critical incidents, so called critically critical incidents, which are perceived differently and are different in content compared to critical incidents. These incidents are extremely rich of information and have the possibility to reveal the real satisfiers and dissatisfiers in a service encounter.

Key Words: customer satisfaction, critical incidents, service quality, customer relationships.

1. Introduction

Service quality and customer satisfaction are two important concepts related to how customers perceive service encounters. Providing customers with high levels of perceived quality is recognized as a primary means of achieving both high customer satisfaction and subsequently loyalty. It has been suggested in the marketing research literature, both in theoretical frameworks and in a number of empirical studies, that dissatisfaction is not the opposite of satisfaction (Johnston 1995; Friman and Edvardsson 2003). Thus, the service attributes that influence dissatisfaction and the ones that influence satisfaction are necessarily not the same.

A distinction between satisfaction and dissatisfaction was first introduced in the two-factor theory of job satisfaction by Herzberg, see e.g. Herzberg, Bernard, and Snyderman (1959). In

essence, the theory suggests that factors causing job dissatisfaction are different from the factors that cause job satisfaction. Drawing on Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene Theory (M-H Theory), Oliver (1997) suggests that customer satisfaction with products is influenced by three kinds of attributes: bivalent satisfiers, monovalent dissatisfiers and monovalent satisfiers. Within quality management, Kano et al. (1984) suggest that there are different kinds of service attributes, such as attractive, one-dimensional and must-be attributes. The difference, in relation to Oliver (1997), is that the focus is on evaluating specific service attributes, i.e. the relationship between performance of an attribute and the grade of attribute satisfaction.

We searched for an extensive database to be able to investigate the role of different service attributes in the service encounter. Through co-operation with a large telecommunication company we got access to data on service performance for different services including about 1200 observations. In addition to service performance data, the database also contained the objective performance of some of the service attributes for each service encounter. For a subset of customers; qualitative data was obtained including critical incidents (as perceived by the customer) during the service encounter. This gives us the unique opportunity to analyze the qualitative data by using the critical incident technique (Grenler, 2004) to identify which service attributes are perceived as satisfiers and dissatisfiers in a service encounter. In addition, we argue that critical incident do not contain enough information to fully understand the role of satisfiers and dissatisfiers in the service encounter. By focusing on a subset of critical incidents, the critically critical incidents that can end or strengthen a customer relationship, a better understanding of the service encounter can be achieved. This part of the study is followed by a deeper investigation of the relationship between the performance of an attribute and the performance with the service encounter (Oliver, 1997).

The aim of our paper is to investigate the role of satisfiers and dissatisfiers in the service encounter. First we discuss different perspectives on customer satisfaction and the two-factor theory. This is followed by a brief discussion on moments of truth and critically critical incidents. Our empirical investigation focuses on a problem resolution service in the telecommunication industry and includes an analysis of 567 possible critical incidents together with service performance data from 1237 customers. The last section of the paper contains a discussion and managerial implications concerning the role of satisfiers and dissatisfiers in the service encounter.

2. Customer Satisfaction

Research into customer satisfaction has developed in two separate directions:

transaction-specific and cumulative satisfaction (Johnson, 2001). Transaction-specific research focuses on satisfaction with a product or a service at a given occasion or over a limited period of time. Transaction-specific satisfaction dominated the marketing and consumer behaviour literature up through the early 1990s (Olsen and Johnson, 2003). In studies of cumulative customer satisfaction, the evaluation period is left open and customer satisfaction is defined as a customer's overall evaluation of the consumption experience (Johnson and Fornell, 1991). As expected, there is a close relationship between transaction-specific and cumulative customer satisfaction, i.e. satisfaction with a single consumption-experience increases the overall judgment of customer satisfaction with a certain supplier (Bitner and Hubbert, 1994).

The perception of individual service attributes influence how customers perceive the service encounter. However, in spite of huge amount of empirical research, theoretical concepts and models, our point of departure is that the role of satisfiers and dissatisfiers in service encounters have not been analysed and understood enough within service research (Johnston, 1995, Friman and Edvardsson, 2003). With satisfiers and dissatisfiers we mean drivers of customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Johnston 1995). When we use the term driver of dissatisfaction we refer to an event, an incident or an occasion when the service provider did not deliver what was promised or expected. With drivers of satisfaction we refer to an event, an incident or an occasion when the service provider did more than was expected (as perceived by customers). As expected, research on satisfiers and dissatisfiers mainly has been conducted using a transaction-specific conceptualisation of customer satisfaction.

Customers are assumed to use some kind of comparison when reporting their degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a service or service provider (Zeithaml et al 1990). The most common framework - the confirmation and disconfirmation paradigm - states that customers' expectations are compared with the customers' perceptions of the service being delivered (Parasurman et al 1985). The assessment can result in confirmation resulting in unchanged satisfaction or in disconfirmation which may result in either customer delight or customer disappointment (Johnston, 1995).

3. Satisfiers and Dissatisfiers in Relation to the Two-Factor Theory

Based on Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene Theory (M-H Theory), i.e. that satisfaction and dissatisfaction cannot be considered as bipolar, Oliver (1997) divides service attributes in three different classes; these are bivalent satisfiers, monovalent dissatisfiers and monovalent satisfiers. Bivalent satisfiers are those attributes that can cause both satisfaction and

dissatisfaction. Monovalent dissatisfiers are essential to customers and are only capable of causing dissatisfaction when flawed. The monovalent satisfiers are extras that provide the greatest source of customer satisfaction. Such a perspective makes it possible for the customer to be both satisfied and dissatisfied with different aspects of the same product.

Thus, the service attributes that influence dissatisfaction are not the same as the ones that influence satisfaction and there are a few studies giving empirical support for this assumption. Swan and Comb (1976) found that when consumers judge products, some attributes are relatively important for the level of satisfaction while other factors (when the performance of these factors are unsatisfactory) are important when it comes to dissatisfaction. Both Cadotte and Turgeon (1988) and Maddox (1981) found empirical support for the two-factor framework within customer satisfaction. They studied complaints and compliments collected in a restaurant context. Their analysis shows the emergence of one group of satisfiers and another group labelled dissatisfiers. Bitner et al (1990) found when studying satisfiers and dissatisfiers with airline, hotel and restaurant services that the same categories of critical incidents cause both satisfaction and dissatisfaction, but the frequency of occurrence differs.

There are a few studies that investigate the relationship between service attributes and customer satisfaction. Oliver (1993) shows that attribute-level satisfaction and dissatisfaction significantly affect overall satisfaction with a service (under-graduate course offering). In addition, Mittal et al. (1998) provide empirical evidence from medical care and the automotive industry that overall customer satisfaction is affected asymmetrically by attribute-level performance.

Most studies either use the critical incident technique to identify satisfiers and dissatisfiers in the service encounter (such as Maddox (1981) and Swan and Comb (1976)) or use customer satisfaction data to investigate asymmetrical relationships between individual attributes and customer satisfaction (such as Oliver (1993) and Mittal et al (1998)). Our empirical investigation aims to combine these two research strategies. First we try to identify satisfiers and dissatisfiers through the critical incident technique and then we intend to use service performance data to search for asymmetrical relationships. This provides us with the unique opportunity to validate our qualitative findings through a quantitative analysis.

4. Moments of Truth and Critical Incidents

Moments of truth is a key concept in service research since the academic discipline was formed some 30 years ago (Carlzon 1986; Normann 1984; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000). We argue that special events unfold drivers of dissatisfaction and drivers of satisfaction. It is

the situations or events, being un-normal and often labelled critical incidents that may contain energy to drive satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction.

The traditional critical incident (CI) approach has been widely used within service management research, especially in the service quality field (Flanagan 1954; Bitner et al 1990, 1994; Johnston 1995; Bejou et al 1996). For an overview, see Edvardsson and Roos (2001), Roos (2002) and Gremler (2004). Satisfiers and dissatisfiers are assumed to be inherent in critical incidents and there for we can use the critical incident technique (CIT) to unfold satisfiers and dissatisfiers in the service encounter (Johnston 1995). The customers' or other respondents' descriptions and views on what is critical have been used to draw conclusions on changes in customer relationships. The focus has been on the incident as such and not on contextual factors. Further more, the incidents have not been related to service performance data.

Edvardsson and Strandvik (2000) reported that incidents that traditionally would be defined as critical (by both the respondents and the scholars) are not critical for the customer relationship since there was no change in attitude and/or behavior which will affect the relationship future. Edvardsson and Strandvik (2000) suggested critical critical incidents to denote incidents resulting in a permanent attitude and/or behaviour change in the customer relationship.

In this study our point of departure is a real problem in the customer's relationship with a telecom service provider. A problem resolution service is offered to solve potential problems with the telephone, internet or broadband service. Critical incidents within a problem resolution situation represent a test of the quality of the relationship and the service provider. How the service provider will respond may form quality perceptions for the future. A problem resolution situation may be viewed as a sequence or constellation of critical incidents and moments of truth rather than as an isolated incident. Edvardsson and Strandvik (2004) have suggested "a critical phase". A critical phase is defined as a period of time with increased sensitivity in the relationship that may change the actors' attitude and/or behaviour in the relationship. By introducing the phase perspective time is included as well as a system-perspective. Critical phases may contain information on customers' future behavior within the relationship. This perspective is motivated by the need to capture the complex nature of problem resolution situations in customer relationships.

From a managerial point of view it would be crucial to understand which incidents and when incidents are drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It is quite clear that a single incident may not always be decisive but rather the cumulative effect of several incidents together with contextual factors. Edvardsson and Strandvik (2004) suggest that a critical

phase may be short and straight forward resembling a dramatic incident or be more long term and may be unclear. A critical phase is when at least one of the two actors perceives a need for special attention to needs or emerging problems in the relationship. The critical phase ends when the situation has been dealt with in a way that results in a stabilized relationship on either the same level as before, a higher level, a lower level or a dissolved relationship. Edvardsson and Strandvik (2004) describe a critical phase with four elements, an initial state of the relationship, one or a number of critical incidents triggering the process, which may escalate through other incidents but eventually results in a final outcome with consequences for the relationship. In our study a technical problem may trigger the process and lack of service attitude or unfulfilled promises from the service provider may escalate the situation. We are in the paper taking the customer's perspective as we study problem resolution situations. When analyzing a critical phase we focus on the critical incidents and combinations of critical incidents.

In this article we define the outcome of a critical phase as an enduring change in customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service provider. We label these incidents Critically Critical Incidents (CCI) and argue that by identifying and study critically critical incidents we may better understand the role of satisfiers and dissatisfiers in a service encounter. As these incidents are remembered they may accumulate over time and may be re-interpreted and combined with previous experiences and thus collecting energy to become drivers of dissatisfaction or satisfaction.

5. An Empirical Investigation

5.1 Collection and Analysis of Data

Through co-operation with a large telecommunication company we got access to data on service performance for a problem resolution service. The database included service performance for the overall service experience as well as for different service components. For a subset of customers; qualitative data was obtained including critical incidents (as perceived by the customer) during the service encounter.

All data have been collected by phone interviews with customers by a professional research firm specializing in computer-assisted telephone interviewing. Most of the questions were close-ended (required the respondents to choose one alternative) and the respondents were asked to place their responses on a five-point scale, with "strongly disagree" (1) and "strongly agree" (5) as anchors. For a subset of customers that were dissatisfied with the

overall service (1 or 2) or really satisfied (5), open-ended questions were included to gain more knowledge concerning their recent service encounter.

The open-ended questions were coded according to a classification scheme by two independent judges. The classification scheme was developed to make it possible to identify which of these customers that had experienced a critical incident during the service encounter. In addition, the coding scheme included (1) where in the service process the incident had occurred, (2) type of incident, (3) number of incidents, (4) criticality of incident, (5) results of repair, (6) type of customer reaction. Special emphasis was made to identify incidents related to time (7) and customer-employee interaction (8). The coding of the open-ended questions was performed by two independent judges. The agreement in the coding procedure between the two judges ranged between 70 and 90% for the different categories. Dimension number 6 (type of customer reaction) achieved a low agreement score and was dropped from the subsequent analysis.

Our analysis includes of both a qualitative and a quantitative analysis. The qualitative analysis focus on the critically critical incidents, i.e. the group of critical incidents that on the one hand could strengthen or weaken a customer relationship. These incidents were analyzed through content analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying causes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This is followed by a quantitative analysis of the relationships between service attributes and service performance. Mittal et al. (1998) provide evidence that an investigation where customer satisfaction is replaced by service performance provide similar results as investigating customer satisfaction per se.

5.2 Overview of Data

Altogether, 567 open-ended questions concerning the repair service were investigated and coded according to our classification scheme. Of these 567 open-ended questions we classified 217 as positive critical incidents and 243 as negative critical incidents. In addition, 19 incidents concerned both positive and negative incidents and 88 were not really critical incidents and were dropped from further analysis. In about 25 percent of the cases, more than one critical incident was experienced during the service encounter. Also, 50 of the 460 critical incidents were identified as critically critical incidents, i.e. these incidents have the possibility to either end or strengthen the relationship between the service provider and the customer (Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2002).

5.3 Criticality of Critical Incidents

Altogether 50 of the 460 incidents were identified as critically critical incidents. In theory, these incidents have the possibility to either end or strengthen the relationship between the service provider and the customer. The question is if there is any empirical evidence to strengthen the claim that these incidents are more severe for the customer relationship. A direct comparison between customer satisfaction and the number of incidents during a service encounter between different levels of criticality for negative service encounters was conducted, see Table 1. Our analysis shows that for negative critical incidents, there are statistical differences regarding both customer satisfaction and the number of incidents. Customers who experience negative critically critical incidents are more dissatisfied with the service encounter and there is often more than one thing that has gone wrong. A similar analysis is not possible for positive critical incidents since there are very few cases of positive critically critical incidents (12 cases). In addition, we examined the frequency of occurrence of different kinds of incidents between the critically critical incidents and other critical incidents. Examining the frequency of occurrence for different types of incidents (category 2) reveals that customer-employee interaction is overrepresented (compared to time) within the critically critical incidents (Chi-square = 17.664; $p < 0.01$). This reveals that the underlying causes of the critically critical incidents, although they can be described with the same categories appear to a different extent. Some incidents to a lesser extent influence the relationship between the customer and the service provider.

Table 1. A comparison of negative critical incidents with different levels of criticality.

Dimensions	CI (n=205)	CCI (n=38)	Significance
Customer satisfaction	1.63	1.36	$p < 0.05$
No. of incidents	1.21	1.53	$p < 0.01$

As a next step, we carried out a content analysis of the group of 50 critical incidents (CI) in our data set being most critical. We label them critically critical incidents (CCI). We used constant comparative analysis to identify satisfiers and dissatisfiers in these narratives. Our aim is to identify and illustrate different underlying drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction when it comes to how the service provider has dealt with and solved technical problems in the relationship with their customers, see Table 2. Our focus is on the customers' service experiences of how their problems have been solved.

Table 2. An overview of categories of positive and negative critically critical incidents.

Negative Critically Critical Incidents	Positive Critically Critical Incidents
The customer had to wait too long to get in touch with the service provider and/or to get the problem solved	The service provider solved the problem fast/prompt
The personnel of the service provider were not very helpful and did not care.	The service provider solved the problem fast and in a service-oriented way
The service provider did not keep promises when it comes to call the customer or to fix the problem	The technicians were perceived to be very competent
The service provider blame the customer's equipment e.g. computer or phone to cause the problem	The personnel of the service provider were very friendly and helpful.
The customer had to wait too long to get the repair and the interaction with the service provider was unpleasant.	

The analysis of the negative critically critical incidents reveal that customers will be dissatisfied if the service provider does not respond fast enough as defined by the customer's time frame, trust the customer's description of the situation, keep promises and solve the problem so that the (same) problem does not come back again. Our content analysis also shows that there often is a combination or constellation of factors which forms the basis for dissatisfiers. In our data we find many different combinations of factors where employees lack of service orientation that is bad attitude and behavior in interaction with customers over the phone, combined with the waiting time being too long, complicated routines or broken promises. Other combinations include bad experiences earlier in the relationship with the service provider when the problem was not solved in a satisfactory way. A common pattern is that the customer feels he or she is ignored, the service provider does not trust his description of the situation and there is a strong, negative emotional and cognitive response resulting in a mental mark in the long term memory. Our analysis also indicates that customers become more sensitive if the service provider does not keep promises when it comes to problem resolutions. The zone of tolerance, that is how much deviation the customer accepts from what the service provider has promised or what the customer expects, becomes narrow.

The analysis of the positive critically critical incidents illustrate that a quick response, to trust the customer or to exceed the customer's expectation may result in customer delight. Our data show that a prompt response when it comes to fix the problem, carried out in a

service oriented way by technicians being perceived as competent by the customer, is a successful recovery strategy and we may conclude drives satisfaction. Our analysis also shows that there often is a combination of factors forming the basis for satisfiers. In our data we find many constellations where the employees' service oriented attitude and behavior in interaction with customers over the phone, and ability to fix the problem faster than the customer expects result in customer delight. A common pattern is that the customer feels he or she is important and the service provider does what ever is possible to give a good service and to solve the problem. This may result in a strong, positive emotional and cognitive response resulting in a mental mark in the long term memory.

On an overall level, 6 classes of critically critical attributes were identified from our qualitative analysis. Some of these classes appear both as positive and negative critically critical incidents, while others appear only as one of these kinds of incidents. When we compare these kinds of incidents with what is available in our quantitative data set on service performance, three kinds of attributes can be identified (time, employee and customer-employee interaction). These attributes will be used in the last part of the analysis to investigate asymmetrical relationships. One of the 6 classes of critically critical incidents concerns that two factors together dramatically worsen or enhance the performance of the service. An in-depth investigation is conducted to investigate the interaction effect of time and customer-employee interaction.

To sum up, critically critical incidents are special compared to ordinary critical incidents. Our results reveal that for instance negative critically critical incidents are perceived to be lower in service performance, have a different content, the frequency of occurrence of specific incidents are different and often several factors goes wrong during an incident.

5.4 Combination of Incidents

Our qualitative analysis reveals that when a combination of different incidents appears in a service encounter it is often perceived as a critically critical incident. The most common combination for positive critically critical incidents is that the service provider solves the problem quick and that the customer perceives the service personnel as very helpful and friendly. As a contrast, the most common combination for negative critically critical incidents is that the service provider takes too long to solve the problem and that the customer perceives the service personnel as unhelpful or unfriendly. Some examples of such incidents follow below...

- "The fault has existed for a long time and we got a not friendly treatment from our telecom provider"

- “I got faulty information from my telecom provider. They claimed that my modem was broken, but the problem was actually at the telecom provider. It took them three weeks and four phone calls before the technicians came and I got some actual help. I later switched telecom provider”
- “The telecom provider sent technicians to us three times without solving the problem. I felt no ambition to solve the problem. Altogether it took 6 weeks for the telecom provider to get our phone working”

To further validate if a combination of factors are important as satisfiers and dissatisfiers a general linear model was estimated using overall service performance as a dependant variable, with time and customer-employee interaction as independent variables. In addition a two-way interaction term involving time and customer-employee interaction was included. The estimated model for perceived service performance explains 64% of the variation in service performance, see Table 3. Consistent with our predicted results both time and customer-employee interaction have a significant impact on perceived service performance. The effect sizes reveal a positive linear effect for time and customer-employee interaction ($\beta_{\text{time}} = 0.38, p < 0.01$; $\beta_{\text{interaction}} = 0.25$), as well as a positive interaction effect between time and customer-employee interaction ($\beta_{\text{interaction*time}} = 0.04$).

Table 3. A model for the effect of time and customer-employee interaction on service performance.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance (two-tailed)
Intercept	7.461	1	7.461	13.345	0.001
Time * Interaction	2.968	1	2.968	5.309	0.021
Time	18.778	1	18.778	33.587	0.001
Interaction	13.565	1	13.565	24.263	0.001
Error	460.676	824	0.559		
Total	9718.000	828			

The investigated combination of time and customer-employee interaction reveals that there exist service attributes, that when they go wrong during the same service encounter contribute to worsen perceived service performance more than the single attributes one by one. This empirical evidence is consistent with the claim by Edvardsson and Strandvik (2004) that perhaps a critical phase is a better way to investigate what is going on in a customer relationship compared to investigating critical incidents individually.

5.5 Identifying Asymmetrical Relationships

As the last part of our analysis, we used the database on service performance to investigate the relationship between the performance of an attribute and the performance of the service encounter (Oliver, 1997). For some service attributes this was not possible, since the measures of these variables only contained two service levels. For each service attribute, two separate regression models were estimated. The first regression model only focused on a linear relationship between the two variables, while the second regression model also included a nonlinear relationship. For each set of variables, the two regression models were compared on significance levels and explanatory power. The results of these analyses were a classification of some service attributes according to the Satisfier - Dissatisfier framework. The regression models and the classification of three service attributes are provided in Table 4. As can be seen, time and technician are best displayed as bivalent satisfiers, i.e. the relationships are best described as linear relationships. On the contrary, the employee-customer customer-employee interaction can be a monovalent satisfier, i.e. the relationship between the service attribute and service performance is best described as asymmetrical. One possible explanation for the asymmetrical relationship might be that customers have low expectations on the service orientation of employees when contacting a call center to get help with problem resolution.

Table 4. A classification of some service attributes in relation to the two-factor theory(* = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; ns = non significant).

Factors	Linear Regression Model	Nonlinear regression model	Classification
Time (TI)	SP = 0.65(**)*TI R ² = 0.566	SP = 0.67(**)*TI - 0.004 ^(ns) *TI ² R ² = 0.566	Bivalent satisfier
Technician (T)	SP = 0.65(**)*T R ² = 0.361	SP = 0.57(**)*T + 0.012 ^(ns) *T ² R ² = 0.360	Bivalent satisfier
Interaction (I)	SP = 0.665(**)*I R ² = 0.356	SP = 0.34(*)*I + 0.05(*)*I ² R ² = 0.360	Monovalent satisfier

We succeeded to identify asymmetrical relationships between service attributes and overall service performance. This is important, since it strengthens the two-factor theory of customer satisfaction, as well as the theory of attractive quality that both builds on that these kinds of relationships can be asymmetrical. Similar to Mittal et al (1998), the explanatory power of the regression models that include asymmetrical relationships do not increase much compared to the linear models. More research is needed to further investigate how the explanatory

power is affected by including asymmetrical relationships for several service attributes.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

First, customers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction with a service provider is always based on experiences. Some experiences are very positive and others very negative as perceived by the customer. Second, the drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not necessarily the same. Third, drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction are expressed or made visible in certain events or service encounters. These are the critically critical incidents while most service encounters are "normal" and will not have any major impact on the customer's satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Some critical incidents have enough energy to change a customer's satisfaction level not only the immediate satisfaction but the enduring perception of the service and/or service provider. We call the service encounters or events with impact power critically critical incidents.

The empirical evidence is built on both a qualitative analysis of critically critical incidents and a quantitative analysis of service performance data. Critically critical incidents are special compared to ordinary critical incidents. In theory, they are the incidents that have the possibility to end or strengthen a customer relationship. In practice, our results show that these incidents are perceived differently concerning the service performance, the content of them are different and the occurrence of specific incidents are different. In addition the critically critical incidents often include more than one incident. This strengthens the claim by Edvardsson and Strandvik (2004) that perhaps it is more important to search for critical phases instead of specific incidents in a customer relationship. It is quite clear that a single incident may not always be decisive but rather the cumulative effect of several incidents together with contextual factors.

The quantitative analysis of the service performance data reveals that in the service encounter, there are service attributes that interact to strengthen or worsen service performance. In this study, an interaction effect of two service attributes was identified by using the critical incident technique. Through triangulation, the interaction effect was validated through an investigation of service performance. In addition, our study contributes with a better understanding of monovalent satisfiers and dissatisfiers as well as bivalent satisfiers. Concerning the context of problem resolution in the telecommunication industry, the customer-employee interaction is identified as a monovalent satisfier. To sum up, the traditional way to look upon the relationship between service attributes and service

performance is as a linear relationship. Our study shows that there are other alternatives and that they, in this empirical context, provide better descriptions of this relationship. In the context of a problem resolution service, we identify both an interaction between two service attributes and an asymmetrical relationship. More research is needed to investigate how well different alternatives to linear models of service performance perform in different empirical contexts.

Our study suggests that service providers should focus on not only giving promises, but also delivering the promise in a service oriented way by competent employees. When a problem occurs and the customer needs help, it must be easy for him to reach the service company and get in touch with the right person, get a clear and acceptable promise when the problem will be solved and then deliver the solution no later than was promised. Managers should learn from favourable and unfavourable customer's experiences by identifying and analysing critically critical incidents. This way, managers will understand more about the role of satisfiers and dissatisfiers in the service encounter and in customer relationships.

In future research we need to study more in-depth and in other service contexts how different constellations, forming the basis for satisfiers and dissatisfiers, are formed and their effects on the customer relationship. We also suggest a study on different time dimensions when it comes to problem resolution services in different service industries. A third suggestion is a study focusing on the critically critical incidents which change customer relationships and may be will lead to customer switching.

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